

The Prairie Light Review

Volume 43 | Number 1

Article 44

Fall 12-1-2020

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College of DuPage

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Recommended Citation

Blake, Devon (2020) "Hog-Tied," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 43 : No. 1 , Article 44.
Available at: <https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol43/iss1/44>

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Hog-Tied

Devon Blake

The five of them eyed one another. What now? The thought rolled through each of their minds. Eloise bit her nails and stared with her doughy brown eyes at the garage door. Chapman attempted to return his focus to the video game he was once playing, but his fingers only moved with half of his usual fervor. Paul, his hands intertwined, tasseled his dirty blonde hair as if creating as much friction as possible would stimulate his brain to think faster. Meanwhile, Marc couldn't hold his tongue any longer.

"Bryce, this is all your fault. Fix it!" Marc stood at a whopping six foot six but seemed taller as he loomed over Bryce. Bryce shrugged his shoulders and grabbed the pack of cigarettes off the mantle.

"Whatever...I supply a service. One you seem to enjoy a lot too, Marc. Huh? So, shut up with that blame game— we're in this shit together." Bryce patted his pockets, "Eloise!" he snapped, "Where's the lighter?"

Eloise had bit her thumbnail so far down that it began to bleed and was sucking on the wounded digit as if she were a toddler. Her eyes, usually full of carefree spirit, were lachrymose and about to overflow. She was not sure how she had gotten there or to whom her allegiance should belong. Bryce, her boyfriend, had more than his fair share of shortcomings. He was arrogant and reckless, full of pride, and low on love. Yet, Eloise was drawn immeasurably to him... usually. Tonight though – that attraction waned. Survival of the fittest, she thought to herself.

"I dunno where the DAMN lighter is and I don't care!" She surprised herself with the unusually bold outburst and the men snapped to attention. No one had ever heard Eloise talk back to Bryce, let alone yell at him. "We have a freaking human being tied up in our fucking garage!" She burst into tears and ran into the bedroom she shared with Bryce, slamming the door on her way.

“Shit...what the hell man?” Paul shook his head and stared at his roommates. “We can’t just leave him in there. I mean... at some point we’ve got to let him go. He’s messed up now but he is going to sober up and then...then what the hell are we going to do?” Paul collapsed on the sofa, head held in his hands as he considered praying, but then wondered if God would even care.

Bryce picked up the video game controller Chapman had given up on and began to play; Marc’s rage building exponentially as he watched. Taking only two steps to cross the entire room, Marc lurched at Bryce grabbing the controller and throwing it into the unlit fireplace. Paul and Chapman sprang into action, each grabbing one of the two other men and held them apart from the inevitable brawl.

“Slow your roll Marky-Marc! You don’t want none of this bro!” Bryce shrugged Paul off of his shoulders and backed away from the group. “Look, okay, this might be on me. But regardless, before tonight all of you were happy and satisfied customers. It’s not my fault that ass over there,” he motioned to the garage, “can’t handle his fucking blow.”

Just then Eloise walked through the living room without pause, not looking at any of the men, opened the garage door, and turned on the light. Before anyone had time to react, they heard the click of the door locking. Bryce slithered past a very heated Marc and towards the door, jiggling the handle for entry. When the door refused to open, he looked back sheepishly at Paul who offered immediate reassurance that it was fine, after all, Eloise was not going to do anything. She knew better than to untie a drug-crazed lunatic...didn’t she?

Before the men could hypothesize further about what Eloise was actually doing, she reappeared through the garage door. She stood there so eerily calm that for a moment she seemed like a phantom version of herself. Her hair was matted against her face and sticky with a dark sludge, her bowed legs and extenuated arms emphasized her frail frame, and her eyes were grotesquely dilated so much that they appeared pitch black. The men let their focus fall upon the dripping blade in her right hand.

“Eloise?” Paul asked as he approached her, “Are you ok? Where did that knife come from?” He reached his hand out slowly towards her but Eloise did not budge. She looked down at the knife as if she had seen it for the first time, smiled then looked Paul right in his baby blues.

“It’s from the kitchen drawer, duh. I solved our problem.” Her eyes now aglow and lips smirked with sincere satisfaction, “He won’t cause any more issues for us, no one will know about what goes on here. See... I fixed it.” She looked back at the garage and sighed, partially in relief but also in exasperation as the men were not half as pleased as she thought they should be; she had saved them all. Eloise returned her gaze to her brethren and then continued with her thoughts. “Now – all we need is some pigs,” she giggled.